DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 393 IR 007 521

AUTHOR Jensen, Ken
TITLE New Trends in Public Library Service to Children.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; Cooperation; *Innovation; Library Planning; Library Programs; *Library Services; Problems; *Public Libraries

ABSTRACT

In this discussion spiced with reminiscences, a former children's librarian sees library services for children as part of the continuum of all library services. However, social and economic changes--such as cutbacks in funds, inflation, concerns over book selection, intellectual freedom, and the patron's right to read--have led to a situation in which there are no universally agreed upon and defined objectives. Challenges confronting future successful library services to children exist in the areas of priorities, publicity, user needs, access, community support, creative programming, research and evaluation, relationships between administration and library staff, and cooperation between school and library. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED175393

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

NEW TRENDS IN PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

BY

Ken Jensen

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ken Jensen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

IR007521

NEW TRENDS IN PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

The assignment I was given by Mr. Yeo, to talk with you about trends in services to children was a bit frightening, as I have been away from public library work with children for some years. I have never lost my interest in this area and of all the positions I have had over the years, those years spent in public libraries were the most gratifying. My feeling about trends in children's services, then are colored strongly by my own background, and centered, not just on the trends that I see developing, but on the challenges that I see ahead of us which must be met if service to children is to continue to hold the satisfactions and the rewards which I found were so much a part of this area of public library work.

The assignment also encouraged me to do a lot of thinking, reading, and even some reminiscing. Looking back over my years as a children's librarian in public libraries across Canada I realized once again how fortunate I have been in the experiences I have had, in the people with whom I have worked; and in the children I have had an opportunity to know.

Back in the olden days, when I was doing practice work at Toronto's old Boys and Girls house, I realized for the first time how very literal children could be. There was a separate room for Picture books in the old house, and the youngest children were usually found there. It was a busy place, and clerks were stationed in the hallway to deal with circulation procedures. There was a rule, strictly enforced in those days, that if a child lost his card, he was told he had to wait a week and see if his card turned up before he could borrow more books. One day I heard loud wails coming from the Picture Book room, and went to see what had happened. A young girl, about 6 years old, with long blond hair was standing in a corner, sobbing her eyes out. It took some time for me to quiet her and to persuade her to tell me what was the matter, and her answer, which came out between the sobs was, "I don't want to wait a week, I want to go home."

We were doing a series of TV programs, in Saskatoon, and had asked some children to read certain books and come back and discuss them with us before going on live TV. We never really did know just what the children would say on camera. One boy ran in at the last minute, and when I asked him to tell me about his book, he said, "I was too busy reading it to know what it was about!", and he taught me a lot about programming with children.

5110

In New York, in a library in a Puerto Rican - Black area I learned more about children -- the disadvantaged, as we've learned to call them. I had classes of 74 children arrive with one harassed teacher, and found that the questions we had to ask in registering our borrowers could bring devasting responses. "What is your father's name," I asked, following the rules, only to be faced with the forthright question, "Which one?" I learned that children faced with overwhelming frustrations beat up the guards we had to station on the stairs, and neatly cut out sections from the encyclopedia with their switch blade knives. I also found that these same children needed escape, for we had splendid story hours each week with over 100 children attending, and our most popular section was the collection of folk and fairy tales.

I learned a lot too, about the ingeniuty of children; the boy who stood at my desk, seriously explaining that he'd lost his snake in the library, but would bring some mice in the next day and entice the snake out that way; or Colin, who did sets for the puppet shows, and as I sat with his proud mother for the opening of a new show I heard her gasp as the curtains opened on a lavish palace scene, "That's the sash from my new evening dress"; or Judy, playing the King in that same production (a version of the Frog Prince) when she had forgotten her lines and was supposed to get off stage. With great aplomb the King exited, with Judy's line ringing through the audience, "You'll have to excuse me, I must go and sign the Magna Carta."

It's such a satisfying job to be doing, for the children make it so. In no other profession are the rewards so immediate. A request for a book as good as the one you gave me last week brings a glow of satisfaction; and requests for information come in delightful forms, like the one from the 5th grader who seriously asked for a book on Merry Evil England, and you knew just what he meant.

This joy, which has, in the past, characterized library work with children tends to be dissipated, scarce, or even lacking in times of change or stress; and right now, in terms of public library service to children, we seem to be in the midst of both.

James Reston, a news editor with the New York Times says, "Change is the biggest story in the world today, and we are not covering it adequately. We are very good at reporting change when it is violent (in Cuba for instance) but we are not very good at reporting the economic and social conditions in

Cuba that produced Castro." We too, seem happier at reporting the changes we see that affect public library service to children; the trend toward cutbacks in funds, combined with inflation; the demise of coordinator's of children's and YA services; the concerns over book selection, intellectual freedom and the patron's right to read; the more active participation of community groups in policy making and programming; the historical problems of school-public library cooperation; our feelings that our services are not truly being appreciated, and our perceptions that administration is no longer a strong support for the development of children's services and programming. All this, combined with the pressures we feel on us to make our services more relevant to the community lead to our feelings of frustration because we are not sure just how to go about this new task.

In 1950, Leigh, in his report on the Public Library Inquiry made the following statement.

> Altogether, public library service to children and Young People is an impressive achievement. In the last 50 years, library schools and libraries have developed children's librarians of great skill and personal effect, with an expert knowledge of children's literature. Not only are the children's librarians expert, but also, in the community they are recognized as such. Thus, children's rooms and children's libraries have been the classic success of the public library.

Garceau, in the Public Library and the Political Process, also part of the Public Library Inquiry supported this, citing as the two outstanding successes in public libraries, service to children and service to immigrants.

That classic success was due, in no small part to the pioneers of children's library service, women, who reflected the humanitarian movement of the 19th century, and who were more than equal to the social challenges of their time. These leaders planned and equipped children's facilities; set up firm policies with respect to book selection; they trained staff; they developed creative programs for attracting children to the library; and above all, their own personal enthusiasm led children to an appreciation of and enjoyment in reading. The profession of library service to children seemed more than well established. We had a philosophy, and objectives, programs and goals for service had been proposed; support was available in a

sound professional literature, and professional associations provided a forum for discussion and activity. Yet now, we find after 75 years, despite the increased knowledge we are developing about children and their needs, that the challenges of public library service to children are, ironically perhaps, greater than ever, and much more crucial.

The question now is, can we meet this challenge with as much courage, dedication and spirit as did those women of a past era who were notable leaders and who worked so effectively and energetically for the benefit of children, and can we respond equally well to the social challenges presented to us by our rapidly changing technologically oriented world; and can we do this and still retain the humanitarian spirit which was so strongly characteristic of past achievements.

Looking at library service to children as part of the continuum of all public library services is, perhaps the first step, and viewed from this vantage point, I think it is fair to say that today children's services suffer, as do other departments of public libraries, from a lack of universally agreed upon and defined objectives. We suffer, as well, from a lack of current standards and statistical data that can be used to measure our performance levels, and we need both these elements in order to answer to our communities and to answer to our communities in terms of the social value of our services.

Ask librarians about the future, or about the purpose of libraries, and at best you will get confused answers, mostly based on the assumption that there have been public libraries for hundreds of years and always will be; with purposes described as vaguely educational or recreational or cultural. To survive, we must define our mission, and that mission must state that we accomplish what no other agency can. We haven't really been able to come to grips with that challenge yet, and I'm convinced that our very existence may depend upon our ability to do this, and to do it in the very near future.

There is an old Jimmy Durante movie scene that makes a point. Durante is in a rowboat with a group of men and no compass, and is saying to the men, "Row, row, row." The men answer, "but boss, how do you know that we are going in the right direction?" Durante answers, "Any direction is better than here. Row!" One of the reasons for our confusion is, perhaps, that we have assumed that we can just row, without a compass.

How, for example do we order the educational, recreational and cultural priorities which have, since the beginning of our history, formed the basis for our services? This ordering or priorities cannot be done on a province-wide or even city wide basis, for, if we are to serve the needs of our particular communities, the priorities will not necessarily be the same for all. This defining of our mission, then, requires that each of us, in each of our libraries be prepared, if not to answer definitively, at least to address ourselves to the following areas of concern.

How much effort should our libraries put into seduction and encouragement, and how much to service? We are constantly being urged to reach out to those who do not presently use our services and to develop programmes that bring in the children we have not yet reached. Before we can do this effectively, we first have to decide what it is we are selling; and that takes us back to our purpose for existing. We could seduce so many children into our libraries that it would be considered a great success from every point of view <u>except</u> from the point of view of our purpose. So programs, publicity and planning are effective only when they support and carry out our purpose, however we have defined that purpose.

Almost anything written about children's services in the last few years, and equally, much of what is written about public library services generally, comes out strongly for the position that professional librarians ought to pay more attention to the needs of users and less to the profession's a priori models of good practice, or to the professionals' preconceptions about what a user ought to need. This has particular relevance for children's services, for we have a long history and our tradition has been one which has stated categorically that only the rarest kind of best is good enough for the young. We no longer feel comfortable with this as guiding principle for book selection, and understandably so, but can we put in its place an equally effective policy? This justification of mediocrity is not an easy one, nor is the provision of what can be potentially controversial materials. Most of us find ourselves with feelings of ambivalence, trying to balance our concern for intellectual freedom on one hand, and what we see as our social responsibility on the other. The A.L.A. struggles to come to grips with these decisions are documented in the literature, and their Bill-of-Rights of 1968 states clearly - "it is the parent's and only the parent's right and responsibility to guide his child, and only his child, in appropriate reading materials".

The U.S. Supreme Court laid to rest the concept of in loco parentis, by ruling, in two recent cases, that libraries do not act in loco parentis. How do we translate those concepts into viable selection policies while still accepting the responsibility we feel these ideals place upon us? Intellectual freedom means total and complete freedom of access to all ideas, regardless of the medium of communication. This gives the necessary background to thought, consideration and the forming of opinions and beliefs, and is followed by the freedom then to express those beliefs. The Library Bill of Rights states that it is in relation to access that libraries perform a unique role on behalf of intellectual freedom, a role which I feel we have yet to sort out in our own minds, and certainly we have not yet clarified our position fully, in terms of our stated book selection policies. Our concern is one of striking a reasonable balance between providing and preventing access to reading and viewing materials.

This question of access is an important one, and it is one of the services we provide which <u>is</u> unique, and which has great potential for the justification of libraries, in terms of their social value to the community. Its importance becomes even more obvious when we realize that 85%-90% of all trade books published for children are sold to schools and libraries; bookshops stock only what will sell well, and are at best, limited in scope; while, with only a few exceptions, children's paperback are not mass marketed. The library is, at present, the only agency that can guarantee access to a large proportion of what is being published for children today, and in this area at least, we can, and do provide a unique service. What we don't do nearly strongly enough is to emphasis and publicize this unique service, and the contribution such service can make to our communities.

The significance of a clear, well defined policy with respect to the acquisition of resources is very evident in the Fasick study for Regina, where it was found that children see the collection of materials available to them as being of prime importance.

There is another facet to this important question. If, for example, we opt for providing what the user wants, or what we think he wants, do we have any responsibility to the user beyond that. I hear a lot these days about the introduction of comic books, series books, and pulp paper backs, usually defended on the grounds that once caught, the library can then play its educational role, and take the child beyond Superman, beyond Nancy Drew, to other

materials. So these materials are added (and I'm not arguing that they shouldn't be) but I hear very little about the follow-up. If, indeed these materials are added to capture and then educate, what about providing for programs that ensure that this will happen. Experiments like Fader's Hooked on Books, or Jack Nemshin's project in Don Head in Ontario succeeded, I'm convinced, because there was a concerted effort to work with the users and the materials. Just providing them is not enough. Do we really have, in our children's rooms the adequate staff, the adequate materials, and the adequate programs which must be present if we are really going to accomplish that kind of purpose? How many individual children can the children's librarian work with in one day? How many children come and go without ever talking to a librarian? Again, we have to sort out our recreational and educational priorities, and our decisions about adding the controversial materials to our collections (the realistic novels of today, the sex manuals, the materials on drugs, or on non-conventional life styles, the mediocre, and the downright junk) must be made within a total policy of library service, not as independent ad hoc decisions, and these decisions must be discussed, agreed to and understood by everyone in the system, the adult staff, the chief librarian and the Board.

I said earlier that I saw children's services as part of the continuum of all library services, and I am convinced that this must be the case. Too often, one of the unfortunate trends in public library service to children has been that children's librarians have isolated themselves from the rest of the profession, and as Janet Hill has said, "there are librarians who have come to believe, not only that children's librarians are different, but also that children are different." Yes, we need specially trained people to work with children, but that is not to exclude the rest of the staff. Not until children's librarians come back into the mainstream of the profession will all librarians learn to accept children as people, and participate in providing service for them. And participate they must, if total service is our goal. We don't have a monopoly on children. Let the other staff see how rewarding our job is, and how demanding. We must work at breaking down these artificial barriers, and build up a strength that comes from understanding, and from sharing expertise and abilities. There are problems, and I know this, children are noisy, they disturb the adults, they have questions not easily

answered, and often these questions are generated by what may seem like perverse school assignments. Children take time, but if our goal is complete service to the community we serve, and to respond to the needs of our users, only the concerted efforts of the total staff is good enough.

Particularly when it comes to moving out into the community we need this total support, for this can only be effective when the entire library service is geared to this goal. Children do not live out there in isolation. The majority of them live in homes with parents, go to schools run by adults, and belong to community groups and clubs managed and supported by adults. Programs will be effective only when a total staff strives for total service.

In an attempt to serve the needs of users a greater emphasis have been placed during the past few years on the development of creative programs for children. Provision of materials, the organization and selection of those materials, and the introduction to, guidance in, and utilization of those materials, both for children and adults are all goals of library service. What we haven't done, and must do in the future is to questions how and why this proliferation of programs fits into our mission. One of the most vital tasks of the next few years will be to answer our own questions in terms of accountability and cost effectiveness. Why do we tell stories, give puppet shows, run craft programs, make kites or show films? Time and money are not the only concerns in programming and the fact that these programs have always been done is not sufficient rationale, nor is innovation a worthwhile end in itself. Effective programming must add breadth and depth to the library's service to children, must be seen in relation to the needs of the community, and must be justifiable in terms of presenting a service which does not presently exist, or in terms of providing, for an individual child, the opportunity to explore a new idea, or to be stimulated by a new interest. Children's services must go beyond housing materials if our purpose is to give a child the opportunity to go beyond what he thinks he wants to what he might want, and this is the rationale behind the development of stimulating and creative programming. We must, then, be prepared to state, for ourselves and for our administrators why a particular program fits into the pattern of the needs of the community and how that same program can increase accessibility to materials, information and ideas. Continual evaluation and revision of such programs must also be included, for programs are always seen as a service, not as ends in themselves.

Out of such attempts to develop and evaluate programs for specific purposes can come more useful statistics that will be of much more use to us in justifying our effectiveness than have library statistics of the past. Generally, present statistics relate only to the library's capacity to perform, rather than to our actual performance. Statistics should relate as directly as possible to a measurement of library service, and to how those services are used. They must provide for us the support we need to help us answer that important question, which is, are we really accomplishing the defined objectives of our library?

Let me give you an example - A public library in South Carolina has, as two of their objectives 1. to provide a literature experience for young people, and 2. to provide greater library visibility. The program chosen from several alternatives which would, they felt, lead to an achieving of these two objectives was a Dial-a-Story program. A set up with the phone company was arranged; children were able to dial a toll free number, and reach The Story Man, who told a short story or poem. The program changes weekly, and the service is also used to publicize library activities and up coming programs. The result -- children were delighted with the program, and used it, and were provided with an experience with literature; and it also had tremendous PR value, with satisfying newspaper and radio coverage for the program. Libraries did indeed become more visible. The real question in programming for children is never what program - but why.

One of the major problems in developing the rationale for this kind of programming is that we have difficulty in finding the data we need. So little research is being done in this area of objectives, alternatives and cost effectiveness. The Fasick study is really a landmark study in Canadian public library history and gives us one of our first data bases on which to plan for future development. This study, combined with Sarah Landy's fine Master's theses, give Regina libraries a body of research of great value, and it is a challenge to those of you who work in this system to use the findings creatively. Findings from other studies can be used to support your own research. Too often professional librarians do not read research studies, and fail to use the data provided and this is a professional responsibility which we neglect at our peril. Two of the studies available, for example, that are useful in terms of programming, the Barss and Associates study done in 1972, and Clarie Lipsman's study give some direction on those program

elements which correlate highly with program effectiveness. The Barss study of Exemplary Public Library Reading and Reading Related Programs for Children, Youth and Adults, found, that preschool programs which combine activities for preschoolers and mothers scored higher on effectiveness than did programs for preschoolers alone. In the Lipsman study, her research showed that the program elements which led to a higher effectiveness included the following: competency and effectiveness of staff; degree of community involvement in the programs; the degree of autonomy exercised by the director of the program; the quality of the materials used; and the effectiveness of the publicity. Librarians, as they plan for the development of their own programs must make use of such data. It adds credibility to your planning, avoids mistakes, and will perhaps prevent needless expenditures of time and money.

Any discussion of planning leads inevitably to the relationship between the staff of the children's department with, not only the staff in other departments, but with the administration. During the last quarter of the 19th century and into the first decade of the 20th, administrators were strong supporters of children's services. They were even known to participate in discussions of children's books. It is our job to reawaken that interest. Administrators do realize the tremendous public relations value of children's work and that's a good place to start. It may just be possible that the administrative reaction of pulling out Coordinators of Children's Service may be a reaction against the narrowness of approach of children's librarians, and may not reflect a denigrating of the value of library work with children.

Administrators need information, and too often we have been remiss in providing this. Formulation of goals and objectives for children's service, which in turn, support and extend the goals and objectives of the total system will help children's librarians to see the kinds of information administrators require. Just as much of an administrator's time is given over to educating his Board, much of the time of the staff in children's services must go toward educating the administration. Once children's services are seen as part of the continuum of public library services, this becomes easier. Talk to your administrators, tell them what you need, in terms of staff, money, facilities and resources, but tell them why. Involve them in policy making, so they will understand the programs that are necessary to implement those policies, and do this as a year round activity, and not only as a budget

exercise. Develop with them long-range plans, so that they will be prepared for yearly budget requests. Show them how children's services fit into the total service concept. The book selection policy, as only one example, is one area where better communication and understanding between administrators and children's librarians is necessary if the philosophical concepts embodied in intellectual freedom are to be effectively communicated to the library staff and to the community. Ask your administrators to review books for you, invite them to attend your book selection committee meetings often enough so that they will understand what the problems are, and together arrive at a policy. Set out your program plans and explain to your administrator how you plan to achieve your objectives. Relate your staff and budget needs to these programs, and give this information to your chief librarian. He is the one who must persuade the Board of the value of these programs, and who must be prepared to carry this request to Council. Libraries do not, unfortunately, rank at the top of city agendas. His task then, is to develop arguments and evidence supporting the possible contributions of library services to those agencies which outrank his. To do this job adequately, he must have facts, information and evidence of long range planning, and it is part of our responsibility to provide him with this. Sell your programs to the other members of the library staff, you'll need their support at times when decisions on priorities must be made, and any administrator will be impressed by requests supported by more than one department. Dorothy Broderick's study of children's services in New York showed clearly that regardless of size of operation, library service to children can be as good as the Chief Librarian and the Board want it to be. The long, hard look that administrators are taking at children's services, may, if we react effectively and positively, generate a stronger, sounder and more responsive service.

As an example of this type of response, do get and read a copy of the report done by the Boys and Girls Services Task Force of the Toronto Public Libraries, which sets out goals, objectives and priorities. This report was prepared in response to the Toronto Public Library Board's request that the staff consider and respond to the Management Study carried out by M. Beckman Associates. The report is a compilation of the findings of nine committees, and it is worth looking at, to see how, through a mobilization of staff expertise, time and energy, a system can face criticism and go on to plan for change.

No survey of trends in public library service can overlook the thorny issue of school public library cooperation. It's perennially with us. It surfaces, dies, and surfaces again, each time as if it were new and original, and I don't intend to reiterate all the problems that we know so well. I do, though, want to say one thing. Few areas in Saskatchewan have adequate school library facilities, and at present, it is more, not less, that we need in the area of service to children. Until we reach a saturation level, duplication of services should not be one of our major concerns. True cooperation between two agencies requires two strong agencies, and in Saskatchewan we are certainly still flying on one wing. As professional librarians, committed to serving children, one of our major responsibilities is to support, and support vocally the expansion, development and growth of adequate school library service. School personnel need this support.

S.L.A. made a start this year at North Battleford, where a workshop session did, I think, do much to further an understanding of the problems that do exist. Now we need action, and we need public library support in lobbying the government to legislate at least a minimum level of service for all schools in the province, and adequate consultative staff at the provincial and unit levels. This is, I believe where cooperation in this province should start. As librarians we must be concerned about children who are not provided with easy access to the resources needed to support their educational programs, and we must make this concern known at local, district and provincial jurisdictions. Cooperation must begin at this level. Effective coordination of services will more likely occur when school boards have adequate personnel and resources, and when they have finally been firmly convinced that materials and staff can make a difference to a child's achievement in school. The child's right to such services should be a major concern of any librarian, and we must make this concern known to our government.

I said at the beginning of my talk that despite our long history and our tradition of success in the past that the challenges of public library service to children are today greater than ever and more crucial. I am also convinced that we can meet these challenges. We have knowledgeable, committed, professional people today as we did in the past, people trained to know and to understand the importance of what we are about. So much is asked of us. Librarianship is potentially an absorbing and exciting profession, and we have people who have that sense of urgency that sends them out to their community to assail people with the resources of the library.

I began this morning by looking back. Let me also end, by quoting, from that tradition, a well know librarian and critic, Frances Clarke Sayers, who, in 1949, wrote this about children's librarians.

> We have been called many things in our time - gentle and genteel; modest and mousy; learned and lame; dedicated and dowdy; unprepossessing and underpaid. I hope for the day when we shall be called the belligerent profession; a profession that informed, illuminated, radiated by a fierce and beautiful love of books - a love so overwhelming that it engulfs community after community and makes the culture of our time distinctive, individual, creative, and truly of the spirit.

We could have no better goal than to have a part in making the culture of our time distinctive, individual, creative, and truly of the spirit; and we can make this a reality by taking the time, and making the effort to plan so that it must happen.

John Ciardi said, in one of his addresses, "I hope the next time the young go out for intellectual rebellion they will think to try the library. It's still the most subversive building in town." Myra Livingstone echoes this in her poem,

QUIET

it says
in the library

QUIET

and what I want to know is

what's quiet
inside the books
with all those
ideas and words

SHOUTING?

To prepare the young for rebellion and to help them hear, in the noisy world we live in, the ideas which are shouting at them from our shelves is not a job for the timid. Let's accept the challenge and show the world what we can accomplish when we practice a belligerent professionalism -- beginning today. In the final analysis, the new trends in public library service for children will be what <u>we</u> make them.